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Fishing in Shallow Waters: The Nebraska Legislature and the State's Faculty Quotas

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Fishing in Shallow Waters: The Nebraska Legislature and the State's Faculty Quotas

Abstract

As part of the "Issues of Recruitment and Retention" and "Building Diversity in the University and Community" topics, I propose to analyze the nature, affects and concerns at the University of Nebraska in hiring and retaining women and people of color. Legislative Bill 389 has had four years, but did it work? Could it work?

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In 1997 the Nebraska Legislature, a unicameral body consisting of thirty-five white males, 13 white females and one black male, passed LB 389. A portion of this bill stipulated that the state's university system should "implement the goal of recruiting, developing and retaining minority and women faculty." The ultimate goal of the bill was to recruit, hire and retain enough women and people of color to place the University of Nebraska University system in the "top twenty-five percent among the Board of Regent's peer institutions in the employment of women and minority faculty members." As a benchmark for progress, the Legislature intended for the Nebraska system to rank "among the top fifty percent" by 1 August 2001.

In a paper prepared by Kathy Tenopir of the Legislative Fiscal Office entitled "Legislative Resolution 489: Women and Minority Faculty at the University of Nebraska," analyzes the progress through the year 1999 of Nebraska's universities in meeting the stated quotas. However, although each university within the system (Lincoln, Kearney, Omaha and the Medical Center) had a game plan, the ultimate goals enacted by the Legislature were only partially met. This paper analyzes the nature behind such a bill, its affects on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the concerns faced by the Lincoln campus.

Over five million dollars were specially allocated to meet these hiring and retention goals and the penalty for failing to meet them was withholding funds from the guilty campus. The financial impact on the students, whether by spending the "specific" \$5 million on such a narrow educational goal, or in penalizing a particular campus, is not addressed in the Fiscal Office report. Additionally, through analysis of the number of available candidates both within the state and surrounding communities, along with a look at the qualified candidates U.S.-wide may explain some of the difficulties in reaching these goals.

Further analysis will show that the problem faced by a predominantly white, fairly rural community such as found in Lincoln, Neb., does not readily lend itself to recruiting minorities used to large urban environments or such natural diversity as mountains, beaches and recreational rivers and lakes. Interviews with some of the current minorities and women on campus clearly show that part of the reason for poor recruitment has

nothing to do with money, but with location, size of nearby cities and lack of a large minority community within the state.

Finally, what were the factors that led to the twenty-five and fifty percent goals? Peer institutions are also trying to address women and minority faculty hiring. Could Nebraska's success cause problems with neighboring peer institutions? What if Nebraska gains merely because peer universities decrease their representation, thus placing Nebraska in a higher bracket without seriously increasing women and minority hiring within Nebraska? Additionally, what if women faculty rate in the top twenty-five percent, but minority faculty hiring is in the bottom fifty percent of peer institutions? Is this a net gain, loss, or an indication of other problems with the Legislature's bill?

This paper does not attempt to take a stand on whether or not a state legislature, consisting of 48 whites and one black, should have passed such legislation. The goal of the paper is to define, through analysis of the variables that determine faculty availability throughout the heartland and the United States and addressing the quality of life requirements within the state of Nebraska for this targeted group, will allow the University of Nebraska system to meet the law. The topic should certainly meet the conference's mission of addressing "People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions."

Presenter

Dr. Gary Trogdon graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln May 2001 with a Ph.D. in History. Before returning to academia he was a B-52 radar navigator in the United States Air Force. Dr. Trogdon received a B.S. from Colorado State University, a M.A. from Central Michigan University and a M.A. from the Naval War College. He has taught classes at UNL, Concordia University in Seward and at Southeast Community College. He is currently teaching at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and looking for full-time employment as an American History professor.

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